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Kolaya Creates Novel with Imagine Fund Award

Summary: Christine Kolaya, assistant professor of English, is a 2013 Imagine Fund Award recipient.

(May 20, 2013)-Christine Kolaya, assistant professor of English, is a 2013 all-University Imagine Fund Award recipient. Kolaya will use the award to fund research for her novel *Coal, Steel: A Novel of Immigration*, which centers on the experiences of Slavic and Italian immigrants to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, during the early part of the twentieth century.

The novel will explore the boom and eventual collapse of the coal and steel industries in this region while telling the story of the characters' ethnic assimilation, their eventual interconnection through marriage, and their varied experiences of economic and class mobility.

"Almost all of my grandparents and great-grandparents were immigrants to this country, many of whom came to work in the coal and steel industries in Pittsburgh and the surrounding communities," says Kolaya. "With this project I'm interested in drawing on those stories and giving voice to those experiences."

Kolaya has already worked through some of the written background research for the project, which includes reviewing secondary sources and scholarly texts. The Imagine Fund Award will provide funding for the second stage of her research: travel. This summer Kolaya plans to visit locations that will form the setting of the novel, namely, the steel- and coal-mining towns of western Pennsylvania. While there, she plans to conduct research at local historical societies and tour what remains of the coal mines and steel mills that were once the main industry of the area.

"With my previous novel manuscript, this type of on-site research was invaluable for both informing the story as well as enhancing the richness of the setting of the book. In addition to those elements, my hope is that this research trip will also help me to better understand the unique and often changing socio-economic situations in these small coal and steel towns throughout the twentieth century."

This project is supported by generous funding from the University of Minnesota's Imagine Fund Awards.

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